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ABSTRACT

Games are motivating instructional resources that provide opportunities to learn and practice map, group work, and communication skills. Using the designs of popular commercial, folk, or media games, teachers can create games for their classroom that support geographic education. Many games can be used by students on their own before and during the school day, thereby providing additional and flexible opportunities to experience geographic learning. This paper presents a rationale for using geographic games and discusses how teachers can create their own small-group games. The paper crafts guidelines for making or adapting small-group games and describes teacher-made games. The more informal structure of small-group games provides a break from the regimentation of traditional school activities and offers opportunities for students to make choices during the day that serve their individual needs and interests. With forethought and planning, teachers can incorporate games for both large and small groups into the geography class with positive results. (BT)

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Games for Geography Classes

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Games for Geography Classes

Games are motivating instructional resources that provide opportunities to learn and practice map, group working and communication skills. Using the designs of popular commercial, folk, or media games, teachers can create games for their classroom that support geographic education. Many games can be used by students on their own before and during the school day thereby providing both additional and flexible opportunities to experience geographic learning. Teacher constructed board games incorporating a map of the school, neighborhood, city, state, nation, or the world teach map skills and support the major content areas taught in the elementary social studies curriculum.

Standing beside a world map Mrs. Rivers, a fourth grade teacher, says, "I am thinking of a place in the world."

Immediately, Carole asks, "Is it a body of water?"

"No," replies Mrs. Rivers.

"Is it in the Eastern hemisphere?" asks Roberto.

"Yes," replies Mrs. Rivers.

"Is it south of the Equator?" questions Gail.

"Yes," says Mrs. Rivers.

The general geographic questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no" reply continue until the students are able to narrow the possible answer to a few possible specific places or locations. Then they begin to ask, "Is the place

_____?" "Be certain to apply all of your clues as that was question 15 and you have only five more chances to guess the place." cautions Mrs. Rivers. This is an example of how Twenty Questions, a popular folk game, can be used in a geography class to promote the asking of geographic questions and the use of directions and geographic concepts to describe places and their locations.

Games must have a winner. Teachers may act to reduce the amount of emphasis placed on winning, but being a winner is part of the motivation for playing a game. Making the honor of winning the only reward reduces the emphasis on winning. Games that require a shorter time to complete reward more student winners. Games of shorter durations also provide more opportunities to use a game within a lesson as an introductory review at the beginning of a lesson or as the closure of an instructional period.

Advantages of Small Groups Games

Small group games provide many opportunities for individual players to interact directly with the educational content. With only a short amount of time elapsing between turns, small group games keep student attention focused on the learning and practicing of content and skills. Small group games also provide "safe opportunities" for students to admit that they need help and to receive assistance from a classmate or friend.

Another important way to reduce negative competition and to assure that the "best" students do not always emerge as the winners is to include randomly placed chance elements. Marking some squares with, "double the points for a

correct response," "loose of a turn," or "go back three spaces" help or hinder students' progress toward winning. Since some very young students get upset with negative chances, a teacher may prefer to include only positive elements of chance.

Students who are asked to help take part in creating games receive additional educational opportunities, or they are curious to participate in games created by classmates. Preparing questions for the game requires research to find accurate information worthy of remembering. The wording of questions must be clear and understandable if classmates are to correctly answer them. Organizing and decorating a game board encourages the expression of ideas through graphics, art, and spatial skills.

Laurel Marcus who teaches social studies in grades 6-8 in Spring Lake, NJ finds student creation of a game an interesting project to summarize a unit of study. The games also provide a source for review and recall of a unit's ideas when they are played throughout the school year.

There are many commercial games available at toy and departments stores whose characteristics can be adapted and used when making classrooms games. A few commercially prepared games focus on employ map reading. Games designed for adults such as Life, Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit, or Strategy sometimes include questions from categories of knowledge social studies content disciplines such as economics, history, or geography that might be used with middle school students. The categories of questions can be changed so

that they all match the course learning objectives. Teachers and/or students can write additional questions to make a commercial game appropriate for classroom use. Throughout the year new sets of questions can be added while others are retired to increase the educational productivity of a single game board.

Tips For Making Small Group Games

Teachers can make their own small-group games by adapting commercial games or by changing the content to reflect the geographic objectives for their class. Using stickers and simple designs attractive and inviting games can be developed for students to play. Computer software can be used to make titles for games, game cards, and graphic illustrations. Students can often help to complete a game the teacher begins by coloring or cutting out a game board and pieces with a little guidance from the teacher. Individual students or small groups can design and construct a game as a final project in a unit of study to illustrate what they believe important to know or learn about a topic or nation. Older students might make and teach younger students to play a map skills game which would require them to review their understanding and performance of a skill as well as providing a useful school-based service opportunity.

Guidelines for Making Small Group Games

1. Select one or more geographic concepts to emphasize such as:

symbols	legends	grid
directions	locations	landforms

city names landmarks bodies of water

2. Decide what the student must do with each concept. Some examples are:

name it define it collect it

locate it match it point to it

3. Determine how to win the game in a relatively short period of playing time.

4. Determine who starts the game and designate the order of play.

5. Decide how players will advance or know what to do when it is their turn to play. Drawing cards, throwing dice, and using a spinner are popular choices.

6. Write the rules for playing the game as numbered steps or commands. Modeling the rules after those from games with which students are familiar helps understanding. For examples,

a. Dealer gives each player 6 cards with geographic features or concept definitions.

b. Players find pairs of cards that match and place them in front of them face up.

c. First player asks someone for a card. If the person asked, has it they must surrender that card to the player asking for it.

6. Create place markers, borrow markers from another game, or purchase small toy cars or cut out popular cartoon characters.

7. Mark pathways to be followed when advancing along a game board. Use pleasing colors that provide for contrast between the print and background.

8. Decide on which and how many elements of chance to add to the game so that the best students will not always win. If questions are to be answered, write questions on the front of the cards and decorate the back of the card so that the written questions is not visible until the player picks it up to read.

9. Try out the game to check for procedural errors and decide if game the can be completed in a short time. Fix problems as needed.

10. Laminate game to increase sturdiness and protect the game from damage by dirty hands and feet.

11. For safekeeping and convenience package game in a way that keeps all parts together and displays the title of the game. Pizza boxes can serve as a game board and, when closed, also store small parts use in the playing the game. Pocket folders, large envelopes, and file folders are good for holding card games.

Board games provide a great variety of opportunities for challenging students because there are many ways they can be designed and used. Maps and diagrams may be used on a game board to provide a source of geographic data for answering questions as well as for color and decoration. Card games and Dominoes are appropriate for matching tasks such as words with symbols or graphic illustrations with the state's name or capital city.

Descriptions of Teacher Made Games

Around the Map is a board style game made on a map. Markers are moved on a path made of sticker placed around the edge of the map. On the

stickers are question marks directing students to draw a question card and chance statements such as take a second turn, advance or go back two spaces, or loose a turn, etc. The question cards ask students to locate places on the map, name states or nations, identify geographic features, tell or point to where places are located, find the direction from one place to another, or measure distances. Ideally, students use the map to read the answers, but may recall some of the correct answers.

Another game modeled on Battle Ship uses two file folders attached together so that the sides that are glued together form a visual barrier between the players. A grid is drawn or attached to the side of the folder, which sits on the desk or table. Each student places markers on their grid and take turns giving coordinates. If the listening player has placed a marker in the square identified by the coordinates, they must surrender their marker to the other player. The first player to capture all of the markers of the other player is the winner.

Bingo like games can be created for many different units of study and played in several ways. Sometimes teachers use a computer to create a grid with letters or a word across the top related to the content placed in the squares. Small drawings of a state are popular for the content of the squares as are one or two word geographic concepts or features. The names of states are called or with young students larger drawings of states are held up or definitions of concepts are read. Students whose playing cards contain a drawing of the state or the concept name on it cover the square with a marker. The first player to fill a

row or column is the winner. Bingo can be played on a map to practice relative location by underlining a selected number of cities, states, nations, bodies of water, or other geographic features on a map. The caller draws the names of the locations while the students cover the underlined location's name on their map. Making a variation of Bingo requires careful attention to assure only one person can be the winner for a particular set of calls. The arrangement of the underlined places on each card must be different.

Directions are best practiced on a game board with a grid that is similar to a "checker board." One die in a set is remarked with the letters N, S, E, & W, for the cardinal directions and X for extra turn and L for loss of turn. Students place their markers on the square near the center of the board. Taking turns they toss the dice and move in the direction the number of squares indicated shown on the die with the numbers. Chance elements, or decorations can be added to some of the squares. Smiling and frowning faces on squares make good symbols for "take an extra turn and "loose next turn." Decorate some of the squares of the boards with animal stickers, drawings of road signs, or symbols for various types of buildings. A winning square is either marked on the board or agreed to by the students before playing begins. Alternatively, students might draw a card at the beginning of the game that identifies a winning square for the current playing of the game. The first student to land on that square wins the game.

One teacher made a game about Egypt and created a game board she titled "Climb the Pyramid." Inside the drawing of a pyramid was a path of colored

stickers and students were required to answer questions about Egypt to climb the pyramid to the winning square at the top. Another teacher titled her game "Traveling Along the Great Wall." Questions inquired about the lives of the people and the locations of cultural and physical features important to China. Games with questions require separate answer sheets or the answer can be written on the card. The later approach is easier to use, but requires an additional rule indicating that players draw a card and without looking at it hands it to another player who reads the card aloud and decides if the answer is correct.

Card games are a good choice of games for matching patterns, symbols, or proper names. Playing cards that match drawings of states or nations with the names of state capitals, major cities or continents with the proper name or description of a relative location possible geographic tasks. Physical features, their proper names, and written definitions are other possibilities. If the rules used have students draw cards from one another in an attempt to make a matched pairs, an extra card on which is written such a term as "Washington, DC," " Shipped Wreck," or "Earthquake" and "You Loose" can be added to the deck. This leaves one player as a looser because he/she has with an extra card when all pairs have been match.

Whole Class Games

Teachers in the upper elementary and middle school often seek to use whole class games as a review for a test. Folk games such as Twenty-Questions, described at the beginning of the article, or Hangman are short

games that can serve the purpose of review. Once the name is discovered students might be asked to define the term or tell an interesting fact about the location. Teachers will also model whole class games after popular television game shows such as Jeopardy with students answering questions that review the content of their geography lessons. Students may also take leadership roles and conduct large group games. Large games require fewer material resources for playing, but some teachers like to make a general game board with pockets to hold questions and category headings. Only the questions and heading need to be prepared as the board is used over and over throughout the year. Teachers with an extra bulletin board might devote it to being a grid for the display of the questions.

The long time span between individual turns in many large groups games sometimes encourages student attention to wander from the content to various distractions. Another caution for games involving entire classes is that competition may become so intense that shy or insecure students refuse to take part in the activity in meaningful ways. A teacher who is cognizant of the potential short coming of large group games can wisely change the rules for playing such games in ways that increase individual participation and encourage cooperation among team members.

Rule Changes Increase Participation

One way to increase the number of questions a student must answer is to form teams and require all students on the team to agree to an answer. Set a

short time limit of 15 to 30 seconds for the team to huddle and agree to an answer. Another procedure that promotes teamwork is to have each team member write the answers on small pieces of paper. One or two of the written answers can then be drawn and a point awarded to the team for each correct answer. Generally whole class games work best when used for only a short period of time when they provide different procedures to reviewing facts or skills learned.

Summary

Geography with it vast number of locations benefits from the use of educational games because they can fit into a busy classroom and provide the opportunity to provide extra practices of important skills and to review some of the many facts that geographers examine in order to understand the world. The more informal structure of small group games provides a break from the regimentation of traditional school activities and provides students opportunities to make choices during the day that serve their individual needs and interests. Games are a nice resource for rainy or cold days when students cannot venture outside for recess or at lunchtime, or use with a substitute teacher. Using a map as a game board for a small group game provides students with the opportunity to closely examine and work with maps, which they might not otherwise experience. While large group games require teacher management to maintain the focus on learning geography throughout a playing session, the method of

answering can be modified to maximize the number of students responding to each questions and thereby maximize student attention to each question.

Wise teachers are open multiple instructional strategies and to ideas students have for changing game procedures and rules to make a game easier to play and to promote an orderly environment. With forethought and planning teachers can incorporate both large and small groups games into the geography class with positive results.

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